

# THE SKILLS OF BODY CONTROL IN THE PROCESS OF BREATHING DURING STUDIES OF SINGING

**Janis Misins**

*Riga Teacher Training and Educational Management Academy*

## Abstract

Nowadays vocal pedagogy is based on inherited pedagogical traditions, personal experience and singing practice. Jean Callaghan's research on the work of vocal pedagogues in Australian universities claims that there is insufficient knowledge of physiological and acoustical concepts during work with students, and in many cases misinformative in relation to various aspects of singing (Callaghan, 1998).

The author, after observing voice lessons and conducting qualitative interviews with vocal instructors at the Jāzeps Vītols Music Academy Opera Class in 2008, revealed similar problems – misconceptions of many physiological aspects of singing, including issues about a singer's posture. These concepts require further study and research during vocal teaching, thus its topicality and the reason for this work.

The voice teacher must be very observant and pay special attention to the student's posture. The breathing mechanism and any other physiological processes which influence breathing are subject to risk if they are not taken into consideration as prerequisites of correct posture. The term prerequisites of correct posture does not mean a specific, predetermined condition but rather free, self-confident, impulse control and awareness.

With improved self-awareness one can optimize their physical movements. With proper breathing based on J. Pilates' method, is meant breathing in motion with the body (Robinson, Gordon, 2002).

Observation of these prerequisites is very important during voice lessons, whereas the singer's natural and attractive appearance is the result of many interrelated secondary factors. The acquisition of natural coordination is required to gain efficient use of muscles, freedom of movement and effortless production.

These factors can be taught not only by physical manipulation, but also psychologically, by fostering character building and confidence. (Chance, 2001; Dewey, 2005).

In M. Feldenkrais', I. Middendorf's, F. M. Alexander's techniques on the quality use of the body is dependent on mental processes.

F. Alexander's technique terminology psycho-physical integrity and use of the self are used as synonyms.

The term – psycho-physical integrity does not represent today's understanding of the psychi, but more from the perspective of the mental processes occurring prior to a response to movement or bodily impulses. (Dimon, 1999).

Pedagogical experience shows that self-awareness in singing is not always objective. Improper use of the body are usually unconscious postural habits and the student may perceive them as normal. (Tinbergen, 1973).

To improve posture or improve the use of the body, the teacher should pay more attention to the pelvic area (lumbar region), chest area (toracle region) and neck area (cervical region). Relaxation, mobilizing, stabilizing and activating exercises focusing on breathing should be used during singing lessons. (Middendorf, 2007; Robinson, Gordon, 2002 Brennan, 2007; Alexander, Dewey, 2005; Щетинин, 2007).

Pedagogical experience shows that during voice lessons comments regarding posture are concerning slumped shoulders, protruding stomach, i.e. the teacher emphasizes separate muscles of the body, those visible, and not the body as an integrated whole.

By consciously inhibiting direct responses one can change the usual way they respond to impulses, for example while breathing and singing.

By inhibiting direct responses, it is possible to reevaluate further directions and steps necessary to complete the next response or movement. In order to complete a coordinated movement, it is always necessary to find the balance between stimulating impulses and inhibiting impulses (Nicholls, 2008).

Just as I. Middendorf's breathing process divides breathing functions as based on desire/necessity and breathing based on experience, similarly, F. Alexander's technique processes of doing and not doing whereby: doing is an active process, whereas not doing is a result of a thought process which occurs by itself. One must first learn how to think and not do. Afterwards, one must learn to allow doing to occur as a result of thinking. (Middendorf, 2007; Macdonald, 1989).

During voice lessons, students require a very clear, active awareness, so that they are able to complete these mental processes. During movement or prior to, preconceived notions are used in order to achieve an effective production. The connection between preconceived notions and real production promotes a satisfactory outcome during the singing process.

KEY WORDS: voice lessons/the study of singing, use of body, mental preconceptions.

## Introduction

Nowadays vocal pedagogy is based on inherited pedagogical traditions, personal experience and singing practice. Jean Callaghan's (Callaghan, 1998) research on the work of vocal pedagogues in Australian universities claims that there is insufficient knowledge of physiological and acoustical concepts during work with students, and in many cases misinformative in relation to various aspects of singing.

The author, after observing voice lessons and conducting qualitative interviews with vocal instructors at the Jāzeps Vītols Music Academy Opera Class in 2008, revealed similar problems – misconceptions of many physiological aspects of singing, including issues about a singer's posture. Insufficient knowledge of theoretical aspects and practical skills in the use of the body during the singing process do not give the

students sufficient knowledge of the singing process. These concepts require additional study and research during vocal teaching, thus its topicality and the reason for this work.

### **Aim of the research**

To study the theoretical aspects of the use of the body and prerequisites of the process of breathing during the study of singing.

### **Object of the research**

The process of the study of singing.

### **Methods and methodologies**

During voice lessons, the teacher must be fully aware of the student's posture which promotes greater body movement and balance, as well as the ability to sensitively regulate air flow during singing. Thereby promoting a more precise antagonistic coordination between muscles used for inhalation (chest) and exhalation (chest and diaphragm). (Miller, 2007)

The breathing mechanism, and other psycho-physiological processes, which are influenced by breathing, are subject to risk if prerequisites of proper posture are not observed. The term *prerequisites of correct posture* does not mean a specific, predetermined condition but rather free, self-confident, impulse control and awareness.

With improved self-awareness one can optimize their physical movements. With *proper* breathing based on J. Pilates' method, is meant breathing in motion with the body (Robinson, Gordons, 2002).

Observation of these prerequisites is very important during voice lessons, whereas the singer's natural and attractive appearance is the result of many interrelated, secondary factors. The acquisition of natural coordination is required to gain efficient use muscles, freedom of movement and effortless production.

These factors can be taught not only by physical manipulation, but also psychologically by fostering character building and confidence. (Chance, 2001; Dewey, 2005).

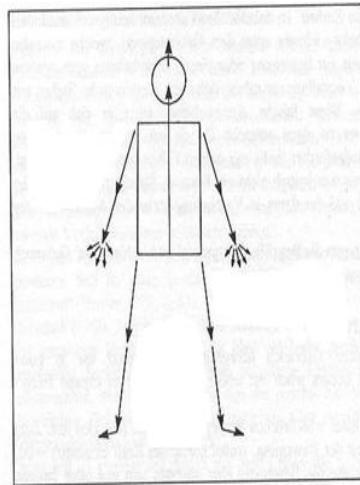
In M. Feldenkrais', I. Middendorfs, F. M. Alexander's techniques on the quality use of the body is dependent on mental processes.

*Use of the self* in F. M. Alexander's technique is based on the observance of the most effective use of the body during specific actions. It is not about the completion of movement, but the mental process as the basis of this movement. F. Alexander's technique terminology *psycho-physical integrity* and *use of the self* are used as synonyms.

The term – *psycho-physical integrity* does not represent today's understanding of the psychi, but more from the perspective of the mental processes occurring prior to a response to movement or bodily impulses. (Dimon, 1999).

*Good use* J. Drake's quality of conscious movement is determined by two criteria. On the one hand is ease of movement, when a minimum amount of effort is used for this moment. Where movement should be resourceful and must occur without internal resistance. Where muscles are not overly tensed and air flow is not obstructed. Under these conditions it is possible to make repetitive movements without tiring. Drake's second criteria is the ability to slow down movement, hold it and repeat it in reverse (except for jumps). Movements shall not be uneven, trembling and unbalanced. If possible, movements should be done very slowly, this indicates that one has control. great precision, speed and the use of strength. (Drake, 1993).

The effects of *Good use* can be observed very subtly and indirectly. Sometimes, only after a certain time has elapsed, changes related to a person's psychological and physical integrity can be observed. *Good use* positively influences overall functioning, this influence is not only long-term, but within time also increases, i.e. becomes a continuous influence, which always has a tendency to improve one's level of functioning and ability to react. (Gelb, 1983) (See Figure 1. ).

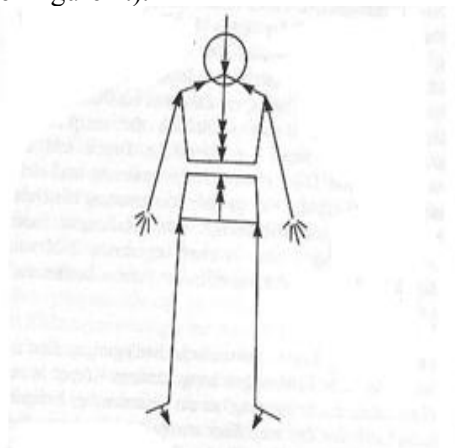


**Figure 1.** *Good use* schematic diagram (Gelb, 1983, pg.35. ).

*Bad/wrong use* is continuous negative influence, where there is a tendency for the decline of the overall level of functioning, becoming a permanent disruptive factor, caused by any functional activity which is a response to external and internal impulses and influences any reaction. (Gelb, 1983).

In *Bad/wrong use* can be seen unbalanced coordination, where some parts of the body take on too much of a load and are inappropriately overused, whereas other muscle groups are insufficiently involved.

*Bad/wrong use* consequences: the head jerked back and down towards the body (sometimes forward and down); a bent back and protruding backside; not visible present, a heavy, pressing feeling on the joints and throughout the whole body – which all causes serious disruptions in the proper functioning of the body. (Macdonald, 1989) (See Figure 2.).



**Figure 2.** *Bad/wrong use* schematic diagram (Gelb, 1983, pg. 35.).

*Bad/wrong use* is caused by poorly coordinated use of the body with two conditions – predetermined immobility and most often, repetitive movements. If posture is corrected during a voice lesson (preconditioned immobility), based on a required, previously determined posture or while completing physical warm-up exercises, the singer performs one specific movement repeatedly, he may take this respective tense pose even when not completing a task. This tension remains unconsciously and, in time, becomes ingrained in the muscle and is incorporated in the person. (Barlow, 1989).

Another reason of *Bad/wrong use* is mimicry or copying. Copying is a predetermined visual impression of a certain posture which does not allow for the effective use of the body's natural functioning.

One can not depend solely on the perception of his own body because the ability of the senses to perceive can be erroneous. Bad habits, for example, slumped shoulders or a bent back usually occur unconsciously.

Pedagogical experience shows that self-awareness during singing is not objective. Incorrect use of the body are usually unconscious and can be such a habit that it is subjectively perceived as normal by the student (Tinbergen, 1973).

It is said that a brain with a healthy receptor systems overtakes and controls both individual muscular movements as well as complex combined muscular activity. But the continuous incorrect use of muscles

leads to this systems inability to function and results in the termination of movement regulation. The brain no longer expects different movement and perceives that “everything is OK”. Therefore, for example, inadequate behavior or incorrect posture is perceived as pleasant and is no longer functionally adjusted and corrected. (Tinbergen, 1973).

To improve posture or improve the use of the body, the teacher should pay more attention to the pelvic area (lumbar region), chest area (toracle region) and neck area (cervical region). Relaxation, mobilizing, stabilizing and activating excercises focusing on breathing should be used during singing lessons. (Middendorf, 2007; Robinson, Gordon, 2002 Brennan, 2007; Alexander, Dewey, 2005; Щетинин, 2007).

The term “standing” encountered for the first time can be misunderstood by students during singing warm-ups. “Standing”, for example, based on J. Pilates' methods, incorporates 10 instructions which require a great deal of concentration and self-control (Robinson, Gordon, 2002).

Pedagogical experience shows that during voice lessons comments regarding posture are concerning *slumped shoulders, protruding stomach*, i.e. the teacher emphasizes separate muscles of the body, those visible, and not the body as an integrated whole. One of the basic elements of J. Pilates', M. Feldenkreis's, F. Alexander's methods, et.al. prerequisites for correct posture is the specific use of the head in relation to the neck, as well as the use of the head and neck in relation to the torso and other body parts, this is viewed as an integrated process in the context of the body perceived as a whole.

The head, neck and back influences the coordination of the body during movement and breathing because of the link between the muscles holding the ribs, neck vertebrae and ribcage.

The head balances the muscles of the back of the neck (sub-occiput) to the atlas and the occiput joint, which is connected to the atlas and the back of the skull. Also, the head's center of power is located on the skull's turning point in front of the atlas. If the weight of the head, regulated by the sub-occipital muscles, is too be in balance, this requires a lengthening of all the muscles at the nape and in the back (Dimon, 1999; Brennan, 1996) and, according to F. Alexander technique, is considered to be *Good use*.

In order to adapt to external variable influences, there is no predetermined position of the head, but yet a dynamic, variable system which must continuously be regulated.

By consciously inhibiting direct responses one can change the usual way they respond to impulses, for example while breathing and singing. Only by inhibiting direct responses, it is possible to reevaluate further directions and steps necessary to complete the next response or movement. In order to complete a coordinated movement, it is always necessary to find the balance between stimulating impulses and inhibiting impulses (Nicholls, 2008).

The conscious inhibition of direct response should not be perceived as the “freezing” movement. It takes time to free oneself from preconceptions of planned movement in order to complete a movement. Internal peace is necessary to let the body to function in a natural way and allow the body to balance and regulate itself.

R. Brennan lists the following advantages of inhibitions:

- allows for more time in determining the proper way to complete a movement;
- helps in not overly tensing of muscles, therefore alleving the coordination of natural reflexes;
- allows for more time to notice the overload of certain parts of the body;
- helps to recognize and change habits;
- gives space to follow one's own instructions prior to some activity;
- helps save time because lessens the chance of error;
- requires deeper, calmer breathing (Brennan, 1996).

Just as I. Middendorf's breathing process divides breathing functions as based on desire/necessity and breathing based on experience, similarly, F. Alexander's technque processes of *doing* and *not doing* whereby: *doing* ,is an active process, whereas *not doing* is a result of a thought process which occurs by itself. One must first learn how to think and not do. Afterwards, one must learn to allow doing to occur as a result of thinking. (Middendorf, 2007; Macdonald, 1989).

During voice lessons, students require a very clear, active awareness, so that they are able to complete these mental processes. During movement or prior to, preconceived notions are used in order to achieve an effective production. The connection between preconceived notions and real production promotes a satisfactory outcome during the singing process.

## Conclusions

Based on the results of the research we can conclude:

- any psycho-physiological processes which influence breathing are subject to risk if the prerequisites of proper posture are not observed;
- good use of the self is ease of movement which is used for this moment with minimal effort, it is possible to slow down this movement, hold it and repeat it in reverse (except for jumps) ;
- *Bad/wrong use* is caused by poorly coordinated use of the body with two conditions:

1. predetermined immobility;
  2. most often, repetitive movements;
- a brain with a healthy receptor systems overtakes and controls both individual muscular movements as well as complex combined muscular activity. But the continuous incorrect use of muscles leads to this systems inability to function and results in the termination of movement regulation. ;
  - prerequisites for correct posture are characteristic of the special relationship of the head, neck, and back, which influences the coordination of the whole body.;
  - by consciously inhibiting direct responses one can alter their usual way of reacting to impulses, for example, while breathing or singing;
  - students require a very clear, active awareness, so that they are able to complete these mental processes during vocal study.;
  - during movement or prior to, preconceived notions are used in order to achieve an effective production.

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## ATMEN ALS KÖRPEREINSATZFERTIGKEIT BEI DEM GESANGSUNTERRICHT

### Zusammenfassung

Damit ein Pädagoge seine Studenten erfolgreich und mit vollem Verantwortungsgefühl auf ihre selbstständige Tätigkeit als Sänger und Gesangspädagogen vorbereiten kann, ist seine eigene Grundaufgabe im Rahmen des lebenslangen Lernens permanente Weiterentwicklung.

Heutzutage stützt die Vokalpädagogik auf übernommene pädagogische Traditionen, persönliche Erfahrung und Gesangspraxis. Eine von Jean Callaghan durchgeführte Untersuchung der Gesangspädagogen bei Hochschulen Australiens belegt, dass es in dem Studium an Kenntnissen aus den Fachgebieten Physiologie und Akustik mangelt. In vielen Fällen stellt man bezüglich einiger Aspekte der Gesangstätigkeit Inhalte desinformativen Charakters fest (Callaghan, 1998).

Der Autor hat beim Gesangsunterricht hospitiert und qualitätsbezogene Interviews im Jahre 2008 durchgeführt, und zwar mit Dozenten der Operngesangsabteilung am Lehrstuhl für Vokalgesang der Lettischen Musikakademie von Jāzeps Vītols. Dabei stellte er Probleme ähnlichen Charakters fest, Unkenntnis in vielen physiologischen Fragen, unter anderem auch, was die Körperhaltung des Sängers betrifft. Beim Gesangsunterricht ist es unmittelbar wichtig, dass der Lehrer sehr auf die Körperhaltung des Studenten achtet. Atmungsmechanismen und alle psychophysiologischen Verläufe, die durch das Atmen beeinflusst werden, werden gewissem Risiko ausgesetzt, falls Voraussetzungen der Körperhaltung nicht beachtet werden. Unter dem Begriff *Voraussetzungen der Körperhaltung* versteht man nicht etwa bestimmte, assoziativ bedingte Aspekte, sondern freie Körperhaltung, Selbstbewusstsein, Impulsskontrolle und Aufmerksamkeit.

Dank einer verbesserten Selbstwahrnehmung schafft man die Bewegungen des eigenen Körpers zu optimieren, und unter einer *richtigen* Atemtechnik nach J. H. Pilates, ist das Atmen in Form einer Körperbewegung zu verstehen (Robinsone, Gordons, 2002).

Beachtung der oben genannten Voraussetzungen ist beim Gesangsunterricht von unmittelbarer Relevanz, denn ein natürliches und scharmantes Erscheinungsbild des Sängers ist nur ein Nebenergebnis vieler, gegenseitig beeinflussender Faktoren. Daher ist es notwendig, die natürliche Körperkoordination wiederzugewinnen, um die

Muskeln sparsam einsetzen zu können, unter anderem, damit auch die Gelenke sich frei bewegen und die Bewegungen eine gewisse Leichtigkeit haben.

Diese Voraussetzungen können nicht nur unter dem körperlich - mechanischen Gesichtspunkt, sondern auch unter dem psychischen Standpunkt trainiert werden, diese tragen zur Entwicklung einer selbstständigen Persönlichkeit bei (Chance, 2001; Dewey, 2005).

Laut der von M. Feldenkrais, I. Middendorf, F. M. Alexander entwickelten Technik hängt die Qualität des Körpereinsatzes von mentalen Prozessen ab.

Im Sinne der Alexandertechnik verstand man unter den Begriffen *psycho - physische Einheit* und Selbsteinsatz (aus dem Englischen - *use of the self*) ein und dasselbe.

Im heutigen Sinne ist der Begriff *psycho - physische Einheit* nicht zwingend mit Psyche zu verbinden, sondern eher damit, welche mentalen Prozesse sich vor der Reaktion auf einen durch eine Bewegung oder Körperhaltung hervorgerufenen Reiz herausbilden (Dimon, 1999).

Pädagogische Praxis zeigt, dass die Selbstwahrnehmung beim Singen nicht gerade immer ein objektiver Maßstab ist.

Fehler werden beim Körpereinsatz meistens unbewusst gemacht, und die Studenten selbst haben sich an die eigenen Fehler so sehr gewöhnt, dass sie sie subjektiv als normale Erscheinung auffassen (Tinbergen, 1973).

Bei der Vervollkommnung der Körperhaltung bzw. des Einsatzes der Körperhaltung ist seitens des Pädagogen auf folgende Körperbereiche zu achten - Beckenboden (Lumbalbereich), Brustregion (Thorakalbereich) und Halsregion (Zervikalbereich). Zum Unterstützen der Atmung sind beim Gesangsunterricht empfehlenswerterweise entspannende, mobilisierende, stabilisierende und aktivierende Körperübungen einzusetzen (Middendorf, 2007; Robinsone, Gordons, 2002; Brennan, 2005; Alexander, Dewey, 2005; Щетинин, 2007).

Laut pädagogischer Praxis achtet man beim Gesangsunterricht insofern auf Körperhaltung, dass man auf *hängende Schultern* und *schlaffen Bauch* hinweist. D. h. die Vokalpädagogen beschäftigen sich zwar mit einzelnen, sichtbaren Muskelpartien, fassen den Körper aber nicht als eine Ganzheit auf.

Indem man bewusst eine direkte Reaktion verzögert, ändert man seine eigene übliche Art auf Reize beim Atmen und/oder Singen zu reagieren.

Während man die direkte Reaktion verzögert, gewinnt man Zeit zum Überlegen, welche angemessene Bewegung man macht oder wie man auf etwas reagiert. Damit eine koordinierte Bewegung gelingt, ist dafür ein Ausgleich zwischen den auslösenden und den hemmenden Impulsen maßgebend (Nicholls, 2008).

Ähnlich wie man die Atemprozesse von I. Middendorf in willensgesteuerte und empirische Atemfunktionen gliedert, versteht man im Rahmen der Alexandertechnik die Prozesse *des Tuns* und *des Nichttuns* wie folgt: *das Tun* ist ein aktiv vollzogener Prozess, der bewusst ausgeführt wird, wogegen *das Nichttun* ein Vorgang ist, das als Ergebnis des Denkprozesses unbewusst passiert. Zuerst müssen sie das Denken und das Nichttun lernen. Danach müssen sie lernen, dass sie das Tun einfach als Ergebnis des Denkprozesses geschehen lassen (Middendorf, 2007; Macdonald, 1989).

Studenten brauchen im Gesangsunterricht ein sehr deutliches, aktives Dabeisein, damit sie diese mentalen Prozesse durchführen können. Bei einer Bewegung oder vor ihr geschehen Gedankenvorstellungen, damit die Performance effektiver gelingt. Diese Verbindung zwischen der Vorstellung und der tatsächlichen Verwirklichung tragen zum Erfolg des Gesangsunterrichts bei.

Das Ergebnis der Studie lässt folgende Schlüsse ziehen:

- jeder, von der Atmung beeinflusste psychophysiologische Prozess wird einem gewissen Risiko ausgesetzt, wenn richtige Haltungsvoraussetzungen nicht berücksichtigt werden;

- ein richtiger Einsatz des eigenen Körpers sichert die Leichtigkeit der Bewegung, und zwar die Leichtigkeit, die man nur in dem konkreten Moment mit einem möglichst minimalen Krafteinsatz erreicht; es ist möglich die Bewegung zu verlangsamen, hinauszuzögern und rückgängig zu vollziehen (Sprünge ausgenommen);

- einem falschen Einsatz des eigenen Körpers liegt schlechtes Koordinieren zugrunde, worunter man zwei Faktoren feststellt:

1. bedingt statische Haltung und

2. häufige Wiederholung ein und derselben Bewegung;

- ein gesund reflektierendes Gehirn überwacht und kontrolliert sowohl einzelne Muskelbewegungen, als auch komplexe Bewegungen; dauerhafter falscher Muskeleinsatz führt aber dazu, dass dieses System nicht mehr funktioniert und jegliches Regulieren entfällt;

- unter Haltungsvoraussetzungen versteht man eine besondere Verbindung zwischen Kopf, Hals und Rücken, die das ganze, körperliche Koordinatensystem beeinflusst;

- indem man bewusst die Direktreaktion verzögert, kann man, z. B. beim Atmen oder Singen die eigene, übliche Reaktionsart auf Reize ändern;

- ein sehr deutliches, aktives Dabeisein ist für Studenten relevant, damit sie die mentalen Prozesse im Gesangsstudium zu vollziehen schaffen;

- bei einer Bewegung oder vor ihr geschehen Gedankenvorstellungen, damit die Performance effektiver gelingt.

Mangelnde theoretische Kenntnisse sowie praktische Körpereinsatzfertigkeiten beim Atmen im Gesangsunterricht geben den Studenten keinen ausreichenden Aufschluss über den Gesangsprozess. Diese Tatsache bedarf weiterer Forschung und Vervollkommnung in der pädagogischen Praxis, ebenso gilt sie als Interessenkorpus des vorliegenden Beitrags und als Gegenstand der Aktualität.